

Delaware Public Health Laboratory Breaks Ground on Expansion to Meet Testing, Surveillance Demands

SMYRNA, DE (Jan. 19, 2022) – The Delaware Public Health Laboratory (DPHL) will nearly double in size to increase the capacity for routine and outbreak testing to accommodate advanced technical laboratory staff and the infectious disease epidemiology program. State leaders today held a groundbreaking for the expansion on the property of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Hospital for the Chronically Ill, located on Sunnyside Road in Smyrna.

"The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for expanded testing and support to reach a new standard of excellence in outbreak response and surveillance," said **Division of Public Health (DPH) Director Dr. Karyl Rattay**. "Having our epidemiology team under the same roof as our advanced technical laboratory staff allows for greater collaboration to best protect the health of all Delawareans."

This project involves 24,954 square feet of additions to the east and west sides of the existing 26,165-square-foot facility building. DPHL will gain two emerging infectious disease laboratories, new administrative office areas, an expanded warehouse, and increased mechanical/electrical space. The 40-person Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program will relocate from Dover.

Site work also includes 4,386 square feet of renovations in the main building, including transition to the new areas, the evaluation and upgrading of existing building systems, expanded parking and fire department access lanes, the

relocation of underground utility lines, and establishment of a storm water management basin.

“We are excited about the additional space this expansion will provide for our laboratory staff to do their important work each day for the people of Delaware,” said **DPHL Director Christina Pleasanton**.

DPHL has worked strenuously to keep up with COVID-19 testing demand. Despite space and staffing constraints, DPHL has performed up to 10 percent of COVID-19 testing in Delaware since the pandemic began. The laboratory reached a high of 6,085 COVID-19 tests processed during the week of Dec. 2 – Dec. 8, 2021.

“State government, our hospital systems, health care providers, long-term care providers, and the public depend on the Delaware Public Health Laboratory’s test results,” said **DHSS Secretary Molly Magarik**. “The scientific answers provided by the staff of the laboratory permits our public health system to proceed with diagnoses and strategies.”

The expansion will house critical instruments needed for genetic sequencing, wastewater, and future molecular amplification testing methods. Most of the new instruments have been installed, but when the new areas are ready, DPHL plans to purchase additional equipment, especially high-throughput platforms for PCR and sequencing, including wastewater and clinical testing.

As a reference laboratory for the State of Delaware, DPHL supports hospitals and other clinical and environmental laboratories. If a laboratory requires enhanced testing methodology, it can request DPHL’s assistance. DPHL also performs onsite inspections for laboratories certified by the Environmental Protection Agency and conducts Biosafety audits for any laboratory in the state. By expanding, DPHL will be able to increase capacity for routine and outbreak laboratory

testing. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for expanded reference testing.

“The expansion of the Delaware Public Health Laboratory will take us to the next level to protect our families. This will significantly expand laboratory capacity, ranging from outbreak testing for the Division of Public Health to wastewater monitoring for the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control,” said **Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long, PhD, R.N.** “I commend the staff of the state’s laboratory for their outstanding performance and quality of work throughout the years to ensure a stronger and healthier Delaware.”

The total expansion will cost \$35 million. Throughout various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, DPH was awarded funding to expand the laboratory facility from such sources as State Public Works, federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grants, and the American Rescue Plan Act.

Construction management work is being completed by Wohlsen Construction. Architectural and engineering design work is being completed by Bernardon. The facility will remain operational throughout the expansion process, and most work is anticipated to be completed by summer 2023.

“Wohlsen is excited to partner with the State of Delaware’s Department of Health and Social Services on this important laboratory expansion project to service the increasing health needs throughout the state of Delaware,” said **Michael Berardi, Wohlsen Construction Senior Vice President.**